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## NOTES ON ANTHROPOLOGY.

MR. LANG'S THEORY OF PRIMITIVE MONOTHEISM.—When last year Mr. Andrew Lang's book "The Making of Religion" appeared, it was a foregone conclusion that much criticism would be called forth, because of the complete round-about-face which the author had made, with respect to some of the most cherished beliefs of the modern Anthropological School. In writing this book Mr. Lang had two ends in view; first, to call attention to the fact that among many savage peoples the same phenomena occur which are being investigated by the various Societies for Psychical Research, and that we should give them the same credence that we give to such phenomena among ourselves;—and second, to prove that the savage in his lowest state was really a monotheist, that contrary to the accepted belief of anthropologists, he worshipped "a relatively supreme, moral, and benevolent Creator, unborn, undying, omniscient, and omnipresent." With the first of these questions, discussed in the first half of Mr. Lang's book, the criticisms which have appeared have had little to do, the interest having centred chiefly about the second. In "Folklore" for December, '98, Mr. E. Sidney Hartland has a long article in which he critically examines the evidence in support of his theory which Mr. Lang brings forward from Australia;—Mr. Lang replies to this in the March number of the same journal, which also contains a "Rejoinder" from Mr. Hartland. Although dealing with the single case of Australia, the discussion has brought out some important general points which are worthy of consideration.

Mr. Lang sets out by declaring that the prevalent opinion among anthropologists is that Gods have developed out of Ghosts. With this theory he cannot agree. He therefore proceeds to examine the Gods of various savage peoples, and reaches the conclusion that there are "two chief sources of Religion, (1) the belief . . . in a powerful moral, eternal, omniscient Father and Judge of men, and (2) the belief . . . in somewhat of man that survives the grave." We have long been familiar with the ideas held by savage peoples in regard to their so-called Supreme Deities, but no student has till now seriously attempted to view these in the light in which Mr. Lang does. Such deities have been considered to be the germs, but only the germs of those which later in the history of culture developed into the real Supreme Deities of the great monotheistic systems;

such a deity is described by Mr. Tylor as "An unshaped divine entity looming vast, shadowy, and calm beyond and over the material world, too benevolent or too exalted to need human worship, too huge, too remote, too indifferent, too supine, too merely existent, to concern himself with the petty race of men . . ." Mr. Lang has had access to no new materials, he has not himself gathered any new beliefs in the field; that his results differ so completely from those of other workers must therefore be due at least in part to his attitude in regard to the facts. What this attitude is, is well shown by Mr. Hartland, in discussing the Australian "High Gods."

Any one who has made even the most superficial examination of the ideas held by the Australian natives in regard to their deities, must be struck by the astonishingly monotheistic cast of the myths and beliefs of some of the tribes as reported in the various published accounts. So marked are some of the resemblances to Christian doctrine, that one is tempted to ask at once, that question which the anthropologist must ask himself continually, "Are these ideas not directly traceable to missionary or other European influence?" It is just here that Mr. Lang differs from most other investigators. He contends that there is no evidence of European influence here, and that the ideas as he finds them printed in the books are solely of native origin. Mr. Hartland devotes considerable space to an examination of this thesis, and insists that in such matters we should exercise the greatest circumspection, and consider all possible means by which the savage ideas might have been influenced and modified by Christian tradition. One of the most common, and at the same time most subtle of these means, is the unconscious modification to which savage ideas are subject in being transcribed by Europeans. Without the slightest intentional warping, without the least conscious fraud; what is to the savage merely a vague conception of a powerful being living in the clouds becomes a thoroughly definite idea of a Supreme Deity, a God, a Creator. All who have had practical experience in trying to record the beliefs of savage peoples know how difficult it often is to find words which shall exactly convey the meaning intended, and it is not surprising, therefore, that observers without careful training, or who do not realize sufficiently the great importance of the matter, should frequently make an error in their choice of terms. Mr. Hartland has in his "Rejoinder" pointed out a specific case of this unconscious tinging of savage ideas with Christian doctrine in one of Mr. Lang's authorities, and Mr. Lang himself is not exempt from the charge, in that, as Mr. Hartland says, his lavish use of capital letters and of terms like

"Our Father in Heaven" tends to convey to the mind of the reader a subtle suggestion of Christian conceptions which, by the use of fewer capitals and of words and phrases not peculiar to Christian theology, might be avoided. From the very nature of the case it is often impossible to get evidence of such unconscious modification as Mr. Hartland refers to, but his position seems well taken that Mr. Lang has not subjected his authorities to a sufficiently rigid examination in this respect, and that when such examination is made, it becomes clear that much of his evidence is worthless.

One feature of general interest and importance to which Mr. Hartland calls attention is the peculiar and rather arbitrary division, which Mr. Lang makes, of all belief into "religious" and "mythical" factors. According to this all that is rational is religious, all that is irrational is myth; and for the proving of his hypothesis of a primitive monotheism, Mr. Lang makes use only of the former. In any estimate of the religion of a people, however, both mythical and religious factors must be given each their due weight, for neither alone truthfully represents the actual belief. Moreover, in dividing all belief thus into "religious" and "mythical" factors, Mr. Lang places under the latter heading only "that multitude of obscene and humorous tales";—a division which, although very convenient for proving his point, in that it excludes all evidence of actions unbecoming a "moral Judge and Father of men," is hardly one which will recommend itself to the great body of students.

There is one assumption made by Mr. Lang which deserves more attention perhaps than it has received. He states that the generally accepted opinion among anthropologists in regard to the gods, whether or not Supreme, of savage peoples is, that they had their origin in ghosts, that from the propitiation of the souls of dead ancestors or tribal leaders the whole system of gods and goddesses took its rise. This is equivalent to saying that all anthropologists are followers of Spencer and his theories of Ancestor Worship. Certainly this is far from being the case. Since Mr. Spencer wrote his *Principles of Sociology* a vast amount of material has come to light which goes very strongly against his theories, and the more carefully the beliefs of savage folk are studied, the more inadequate does Ancestor Worship become as an explanation. Tiele, to name but one of the anthropologists and students of religion whose eminence none will question, in his *Gifford Lectures* in '96, shows the insufficiency of Spencer's theories to account for the origin of religion, and presents in a masterly manner the theory of "Naturism,"

as it has been called by Réville, one of its earlier exponents. The great mistake into which most of the builders of theories of the origin and development of religion have fallen seems to be that they seek to find some one cause, some single factor to which the whole matter might be ascribed; they fail to realize sufficiently the enormous complexity of religious belief, and the futility of attempting to find any single cause to explain it all. How complex, how confused and obscure the origin and growth of religion has been, we are, perhaps, only just beginning to see, and the wiser course would seem to be to admit that there must have been many factors which, taken all together, have been the source of man's religious beliefs. We can then see how different races, under different environments, might have combined these factors in slightly varying proportions, and how from this difference in composition, difference in religion and in religious development would result.

We are passing at present through what in the future will probably be recognized as a period of great importance in the history of Anthropology. The enormous amount of material for study and comparison which has been pouring in for the last few years, affords a body of facts already far beyond the capacity of any one man to digest. Old theories are being called in question, new ones suggested, and discussion is rife. It is a season more or less of unrest and readjustment. Mr. Lang's book comes at a time when it is sure to find many criticisms; but whatever may be the final verdict in regard to his theories, or whatever the outcome of the discussions to which it gives rise, all students must be glad of the discussion it has called forth, and will regard his modern exposition of the old theory of primitive monotheism as still another of the many debts which Anthropology owes to one of its most brilliant followers.

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